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MASTERS OF MODERN ART

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MASTERS OF MODERN ART

COROT

By MARC LAFARGUE

Translated by LINDSAY WELLINGTON

With forty illustrations

TRAINING COLLEGE, LIMERICK.

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COROT

COROT reminds one of La Fontaine. Their art is born beneath the leaves and boughs from a source which never fails. The old teller of fables loved

The forests, streams and meadows :
Mothers of gentle reveries

and so did the painter. True he did not paint animals, but in his studio, when he was working at his branches, he thought he heard a squirrel among them cracking nuts. Like the poet he was candour and goodsense itself. Both were great workers, the one gathering a verse, beneath a line of willows, in the morning when

The stream was limpid as on the loveliest days ;

the other, in his white blouse, painting away without a pause. The painter smoked his pipe in front of his subject ; his marvellously just vision, was accompanied by the greatest refinement of spirit. Like that of the teller of fables, his art seems

in no ways complicated ; in it the world appears to live again, as if by itself. To admire Corot's talent it is enough to be able to love the sky, a valley, a branch drooping in the water, and his sentiment delights both the simple and exquisite alike. But to describe his technique, to give it rightly its place in the history of Art, is even more difficult than to describe that of one of the purest rustic geniuses, perhaps the purest of all who ever saw the light of day. He knew how to unite sweetness, grace, truth, and often power as well. Like the old rustic who wrote *Adonis* and the *Fables* he had more than one manner. Both seem at first sight to merely copy what lies before them, both lead you to the finest heights of poetry. The painting of the artist who produced *Castel Gandolfo* or *The Villa d'Este* is like the verse of the poet who wrote *Philemon et Baucis*. What natural simplicity, and then what grandeur !

Already the growing shadows fall from the mountain heights.

Corot's distinction is not merely the power to enchant us when in front of his works. He was a great painter, he gives one the veritable pleasure of the painter, but there emerges from his work too a secret spell like the spell of music. He himself said of a landscape : « One would say, a phrase of Glück », and indeed one might say this of many of his landscapes. They remain with us like a poem, or a song.

Have you associated him with a particular site ? There you will always recall him. Have you made a journey, when September is already nearing its end, in a country where mountains come down to the edge of a plain ? The light shines more delicately, tempered with the mist from the streams. Branches of vine cling to the young elms and link themselves

above the meadows. Old buildings appear, from which smoke is seen rising in the evening air. From a line of tall cypresses on a terrace there falls a great shadow, but without gloom or sadness. One thinks of Poussin, of Claude Lorrain ; through them one comes back to Corot. He is the most Virgilian of the masters. One is assured of it most of all when one is in face of nature and far removed from him. Already beyond the first line of blue mountains, perhaps, there appears the glitter of snow, a first autumnal snow, whilst the grapes are still ripening in the plain. ,, Who else but Corot ", one ruminates, ,, has rendered the brilliance of snow on a peak ? Did he use pearls, indeed, to express, with swift touch, this luminous radiance rising from the mist ? » One thinks of the bridge of Narni, before such a landscape. And those who have not been reminded of the painter at Tivoli, how often have they found him under French skies ! If not in the fields, then in the towns. Go to Chartres, or to Avignon, it is of Corot that you think. When you have returned, then look at one of his paintings. You are astounded at the justness with which he has placed a great building in light and air. Truth and poetry are rendered at once by a purity of tone, both full and fresh, which belongs to Corot alone. We will try to understand more of the quality of his painting, by watching him at work. How does he achieve this lyrical quality ?

If ever there were a sincere art, it is indeed his. It springs directly from the study of nature. The painter begins his canvases and develops them in front of his subject : he finishes them in the studio. By this means he gets nearer to the truth, adding a touch here and there, or perhaps deciding to refrain. He arrives at the effect he wishes to produce by an execution so quiet and unobstrusive that it scarcely strikes us. We

must search for the secret of this art in Corot's own heart. He had but one desire, — to hymn nature. If he interprets her, it is with the most delicate scrupulousness. He will always recall the actual site where he makes his nymphs dance ; besides, he had no doubt seen them there. If he introduces bathers swinging from the branches of willow trees, it is in some place of which he has already made innumerable studies. In the second period of his life, though he composes more and more, he relies still on his old researches, on drawings made from nature. In the period of his splendid beginnings at Rome, we shall see him drawing with real severity his cypresses, his masses of architecture, the bricks of which still hold the glow of evening light. This delicate and noble art has grown from the attentive copying of nature. One catches the note of sincerity in the artist's first drawings, and one is not surprised later when he insists that his pupil, Berthe Morisot, shall begin again a copy of one of his canvases, in which she had made some error of detail. Every building, every tree in his Italian pictures is a document. It is from these roots that Corot's lyrical quality has grown and flourished.

Notice one quality of Corot's poetry, that there is a winged and delicate happiness expressed in his canvases, whether he is describing the beauties of his Roman scenes, the oaks of Fontainebleau or the Pool at Ville-d'Avray. In each case the painter makes us aware of the pleasure that the site has given to his own eyes. This world which exists, and which he has observed, is astonishingly beautiful. The Corot who is always so near to nature by his search for exquisite relationships of tone and for rhythmically balanced lines is linked with Claude Lorrain. He is a remarkable harmonist. The effects of light in which he delights have no stormy or violent character. There is nothing of Ruysdael in him... And again, how different from Delacroix ! The two great painters of supremely lyrical genius in the 19th Century are indeed

opposites in temperament. Delacroix is dramatic. If he paints a tree (such as the tortured and terribly tossed tree in the picture of Jacob wrestling with the angel), this tree seems to have come from some grandiose legend. In the work of Delacroix, the epic poet, the colour has a thunderous brilliance. What sumptuous lyric emotion there is in his prodigious decorations, such as his Apollo ceiling piece. His inexhaustible palette commands all means of producing splendid and dazzlings effects. Corot, calm and unfevered, attains a poetry which is not less lofty. There is a difference between them similar to that between Virgil and Shakespeare. If Delacroix, who has echoes of Byron, makes one think of Baudelaire, Corot who recalls both La Fontaine and Virgil, is akin to Lamartine :

> *All sleeps ; scarce does the distant and vanishing sail*
> *Whiten as it brings back the peaceful fisherman.*

Of his various manners it is best not to exalt one above another ; we may relish each in its turn. He created some masterpieces in his paintings of the skies of Rome, and others when he evoked scenes from mythology. His views of Avignon are marvels of delicacy. He set before us the margins of a stream, meadows and nymphs, other masterpieces in their way. The landscapes which were enriched by his memory, twilights and dawns, these were quite other things, but worthy of admiration whatever some may have said. A humble *Vue de Village dans le Morvan,* or *La Route de Sèvres,* have different qualities again, they give one the very smell of the land. And lastly Corot painted some very fine nudes, some remarkable portraits, and figure studies. Those remarkable figure studies alone would have made him famous. It may be

that these are the works in which he reaches the purest beauty, and gives the greatest pleasure to other painters. He has a very high place somewhere between Prud'hon and Renoir. What astonishing diversity there is in his work after all, and what a richness in its unity. As one studies it one finds it more varied than one had imagined.

Shall I add that Corot's taste and choice are perfect ? He is never tired of depicting this divine gift, the light of France. No vulgarity ; always this astonishing naturalness, subtle rightness and simple grandeur. These are the qualities to be found again and again from the *Vues de Rome* to the *Rue de Douai* and to the *Dame en Bleu*, canvases ranging over more than fifty years of work.

Camille Corot was born on the 17th July, 1796. Théophile Gautier said he was born « On the kness of the Muses », to which the painter replied, according to his admirable biographer Moreau Nélaton, ,, Well, its perfectly true. Shops devoted to the needs of beautiful woman have always been the meeting places of the Graces. " The millinery shop kept by Madame Corot was in the Rue du Bac, opposite the Pont Royal. Thanks to Moreau Nélaton we get to know Corot's childhood, and the sturdy figure of M. Corot, the father, a bourgeois such as only Balzac has painted ; school years at Rouen, and the years which follow when Corot was a draper's clerk, first with a shop-keeper in the Rue de Richelieu and later in the Rue Saint-Honoré. We see Camille buying his first box of colours and spoiling sundry pieces of material. He was a shocking clerk, as he had been an unsatisfactory schoolboy. In his early days, at school, he read *Daphnis and Chloe* in secret ; in his master's shop he drew under cover of the counter, and if he had to run any errand loitered about the quays, sketching.

From 1817 to 1821 he was a draper. I love that scene when M. Corot, the father, says to his son, who was already twenty-six, „ Camille, you must choose a profession ", and Camille, timid as he was, says, with the courage of despair „ Well, I want to be a painter. " Suddenly M. Corot's stubbornness began to be worn down. His long resistance had its good side. As a young draper, Camille had plenty of time for thought, and when he came to visit the studios he did so simply to learn what it was he wanted to know. He wasted no time trying for the prix de Rome. Camille had not wasted his time with his draper employers, MM. Clerambault and Ratier : the young clerk knew he wanted to be a landscape painter.

In 1822 Corot's sister died, and his father, believing him to be as incapable of painting as of measuring cloth, resigned himself to putting aside for Corot a sum of £ 1500, which came from his sister's dowry. „ When I left my father ", said Camille, „ I felt as if flames were coming out of the top of my hat. »

The same evening Corot was working on the banks of the Seine and his mother's shop assistants came to see him paint. The next day he met his friend Michallon, who had just returned from Italy where he had held the prix de Rome for landscape. Michallon advised his friend to observe carefully and to put what he saw on canvas — curiously good advice when one remembers his own sombre paintings. But 1822 was a great period — full of new ideas both in poetry and in painting. The *Meditations* of Lamartine had not long appeared.

Soon after this Michallon died, and Camille worked in the studio of Victor Bertin. The advice of Michallon, which had made Corot do his first drawing from nature, and the teaching of Bertin, which enshrined the formulae of landscape painting imitated from Poussin, both helped Corot to develop, but already he was master enough to dominate the different influences. Though he could look at nature passionately, he

did not disregard the lessons of Bertin, without which he could never have painted such pictures, later in his life, as *Homere et les Bergers*. In this way he preserved the spirit of the 17th century passed on through the studios. Besides, if he had been no more than the child of nature he so often flattered himself he was, why did he so early in his career want to go to Rome ?

The young painter worked relentlessly. If he went to a gallery he painted some pretty student copying there ; if he went down to the quays he made a sketch of tree or sky. He spent 1822 in Rouen painting doorways, willows and meadows. On his return he studied at Bertin's again. Now follow three years when he made unceasing efforts to express his beloved countryside in paint. In the evening he used to go to the theatre. Like Stendhal he adored *Bel Canto*. He was not insensitive to the charms of some of his mother's pretty workgirls, but his art absorbed his passion. At the return of spring, he started to draw birch-trees, and from 1823 onwards he painted at Ville-d'Avray, where M. Corot had bought a house in 1817 and to which Camille, while still a draper's clerk, had often come to dream. It was there that he learned to love the shadow of woods, the pools and the lovely light of the sky. From the open window of his little room he used to watch the dawn ; he could see nymphs leaving the dewy branches.

Two years had passed since Corot was a draper's clerk, and the next year was to see him setting off for Italy. In the meantime he held aloof from the group of young innovators, and took no part in the lively discussions and quarrels about painting. The English school of landscape, which Delacroix held in such esteem, left him unmoved. Here is no intellectual tortured by mighty problems. What did he think of the great masters, of Titian or of Rembrandt whom he loved later on ? He was unhampered by violent hero-worship : his character was one of sound common sense, and what he had to learn

he learned. But from whom ? The love of nature cannot teach us everything, and even Corot, a true son of Jean-Jacques, but a good, honest fellow, had to follow some other painters.

He had copied a painting by Vernet, and among the pictures which undoubtedly influenced him we must put *Le Ponte Rotto* and the *Vue du Chateau Saint-Ange*. In these canvases the crisp drawing is bathed in a soft, golden light which we find again in Corot's early work. The roofs and the houses take their place wonderfully, and every detail is delicately observed. By the linen waving on the ruined bridge one sees the strength of the breeze. In these autumn landscapes, so beautifully composed, so exquisite in atmosphere, Vernet's talent ranks very high. Corot admired them greatly, but he also often went to look at the paintings of Claude, and especially those which most resembled a direct vision of nature. Later on we shall see that Corot never perhaps attained to the majestic grandeur of Claude, but when he was ready to leave for Italy he was nourished by the thought of the most noble of the French landscape painters. That marvellous picture of Lorrain's, the *Campo Vaccino*, must have made Corot want to go and paint the same subject. He was bound to fall in love with that view of the Forum, with its cleanly-drawn brick buildings, ranging in colour from gold to vermillon. When he arrived in Italy Corot must already have discovered the secret of linking sky and building, and the beauty of a harmonious colour-scheme, in which all the details are merged in the spacious richness of a composition.

Corot, then, had his immediate predecessors as a landscape painter. He goes on to express what was already being felt round about him. He is related to Louis Moreau, and more closely to Bidault. Bidault, who was born nearly forty years before Corot, is much more likely to have initiated him into the secrets of painting than Michallon who had a dangerous

affection for the use of bitumen. His art gives a very direct, fresh feeling of the place he wishes to represent. His picture of the lake of Celano its blue shadows on the mountain-slopes, its warm red-bricked villages with pinkish steaming roofs, and the tree-covered plain is obviously a forerunner of certain works by the painter of Tivoli. Of course Corot had in addition a grandeur, a vigour and a lightness of touch to which Bidault never attained. Fulness of speech, and the lyric feeling produced by the oneness of feeling and delightful tone, are excellences peculiar to Corot. But Bidault was not useless to him. It is a wise move on the part of the keepers of the Louvre to have hung Bidault's paintings not far from the *Trinité des Monts*. One can see where Corot derives from, and get a fuller sense of his genius. By 1825 Corot had arrived at the crossroads where the classic traditions preserved by Vernet met the first-hand study of nature adopted by Bidault.

Finally let us ask what masters were studied by the great figure painter of the future before he went to Italy. We have some pencil drawings of his, dating from his earliest days, in which, with much concentration, using close fine searching lines, he makes studies of faces. One of his first drawings is like a drawing by Clouet, which will, perhaps, seem strange to those who can only feel the flowing, blended characterisation which was the mark of the later Corot, the subtle handler of light. But his genius always was astonishingly wide in range. "Loathing slick draughtsman-ship", as he writes of himself, he was the very man to appreciate the old French masters who drew eyes, the line of a nose, the curve of a lip with unrivalled precision. David was no stranger to him — that is very certain. There are several little portraits of that period which show the influence of David. No doubt the subtle and delicate Corot of these figure studies tended to disappear, but in his later work, compare his *Femme à la Perle* with the portrait

of M^me^ Recamier. The colour is put on in a very similar way — vague enough indication of an influence at work, but we find that they are all vague with this great genius. Isn't it true, I shall be asked, that he also studied Prud'hon ? At once I am reminded that as a young man Corot only studied the French masters, both in landscape and in portraiture. Much later on he came under the influence of Van Gouen and Ver meer.

We have a self-portrait of Camille, painted just before he went to Italy and left as a present for his parents. He appears, palette in hand, with a strong face, soft wilful eyes, and sensual lips. This portrait is important not only as telling us what the artist looked like when he was starting to produce his master-pieces of landscape, but also because it is one of the first of his good portraits. It is painted with real certainty, the masses are solidly placed on the canvas, and the method of putting on the colour reveals the born painter. It is as decided in the modelling of the face as in the low-toned harmonies of the gray, faded yellow and red of his clothes.

What a lovely trip Corot had in the autumn of 1825. He stops here and does a drawing ; there and makes a study. He had so often dreamed of seeing Rome, and here he was making the journey which Claude and Poussin had made before him. — another proof of his link with tradition ; Rousseau, Millet, not one of the great landscape painters of the 19th century were tempted by Italy. Corot indeed felt a little heart-ache at leaving his father and mother, his dear Fanchette and his pretty young friends from the Rue du Bac, but he felt he had to go to see the light of Rome. He arrived at the end of October, and at once began to think of painting.

The traveller was in no particular hurry to visit the galler-

ies. He was not like Ingres who, twenty years earlier, took a passionate delight in studying Raphael, nor Degas who worked there forty years later with his mind on Poussin. Corot was a nature poet, with a frank, charming and radiant spirit. A few cypress trees in a garden, the Coliseum, the Forum and the sky, — he asked nothing more, but at once set to work. No reminiscence of any master stood between him and nature, for he painted with his intuition and his reason. His was an instinctive clarity. He only wishes to express the peculiar sweetness of this serene light, and brings to the expression no theories, no formulae of which he is the slave. He has the ingenuous candour of a primitive, and is timid and scrupulous, but became daring. He sought contentment in the satisfaction of the joy he took in beautiful subjects, which he represented with faithful exactitude. He copied the old stones, the trees, the light and the shadows just as he saw them, but, being a poet, he saw the whole world bathed in an enchanted tenderness. He received his impressions through eyes of a surprising subtlety of vision and turned them straight into rich and faithful paintings. He has preserved for ever the light which shone in that month of November, 1825. It keeps its brilliance unmarred. It is difficult to say what it is which creates this tender radiance. There is an air of divine youth about the limpidity with which Corot interprets his subject. How does he get that faintly shimmering atmosphere, that transparent air, those soft shadows ? Can one stand in front of the *Trinité des Monts* and try to understand by what pictorial methods he obtains his effects ?

Naturally the students of the Villa Medici would have found food for laughter in Corot's diligence in copying the subject as shown him by the honest vision of youth. He wanted to paint landscapes as he saw them, and produced those admirable little paintings which are to be found in the Louvre. Never did the artist show to such advantage, with all his qual-

ities in their purest form. These moving little pictures, mark the birth of a master, suddenly, in complete control of all his technique. At the end of 1825 Corot had only to live under the sky of Rome to produce masterpieces as soon as he took up a paint brush : there was no need for him to find himself. Undoubtedly he produced, in the course of his long life, innumerable and magnificent works, expressive always of the noble poetry of nature, but he never painted anything more lovely than this wonderful series of Italian pictures. Yet, three years ago Camille was measuring out cloth !

The extraordinary thing about these canvases, painted by a beginner of genius, is the extreme rightness of his values, and, at the same time, their lightness. We know that the artist began by careful pencil drawings — genuine primitives — with hardly any wash, unlike Claude, in whose drawings already the golden light seems to be born. Corot, when he drew, — he did not keep up the practice consistently — ignored the colour in favour of a delicate study of the lines of the country. An Italian sketch by him — when he wants to give the shape of a monument, or of a valley — is as exact as an Ingres drawing. Looking at these drawings one sees very clearly the artist's horror of the „ more or less ". By this means he defines all the planes of a landscape without looking for a single effect of light or shade. He is equally far from Poussin, in whose sepia washes the rich brush strokes disclose running fountains, Loves at play, or the trembling majesty of the leaves. During these three years spent in Italy Corot learned by these means how to fix the significant outlines : later he discovers how to suggest a hill or a cloud with one stroke of the brush, and learns to know the significance underlying each delicate curved line. Soon with one line he gives you the land, with another the sky. Corot acted upon his own precept " Never be undecided about anything ". He notes the shape of everything with loving care — olive trees, houses in the

country round Rome, the undergrowth of Tivoli — then he paints them. He can give full rein to his genius, for underneath the tones — delicate as flowers or early fruit — there is solid workmanship.

When one has realised the quality of Corot's drawing during this glorious period of his first voyage to Italy one gets a better insight into his painting. Throughout this exquisite series of paintings one finds this perfect placing on the canvas of the subject represented : one can never get a second picture out of any given painting. The truth of the values, acquired as though it were child's play, goes hand in hand with an exquisite purity of colour. It is all a question of nuance. Corot, born on the banks of the Seine, carries into everything that distinction which is to be found in the skies of Paris ; and avoids the sumptuous splendour which would have satisfied a Chateaubriand, had he taken up a palette. Every one of these tones, even the warmest, is enveloped in an almost imperceptible atmosphere. The cypress trees rise into a transparent sky, the arches of the Coliseum are of a delicious pink — a pink which merges without abruptness into green. This blending of the essential colours, formerly so decidedly kept apart, sings in a grave and tender scale. The greens of these trees sum up the technique of Corot's colour. Each one is different, and there is not one, even in the first sketch where their use is so delicate, which forgets to play its appointed rôle. Anyone who has used a paint-brush knows how difficult it is to manage greens blended with greens — Corot brings them together, and the result is harmonious — like a concert of flutes and oboes. As for the relation of these softly-singing greens, the brown, warm tones of the walls, the broken red which keeps its sparkle, the delicate purple — this is

where Corot excels. He transposes these harmonies by a play of light, full of animation in spite of the delicacy of his style. He has always discovered the point at which precision of drawing should give way to atmosphere.

Let us examine a painting of this period — the *Promenade du Poussin* — the banks of the Tiber in the Roman Campagna, a deserted part of the country where, two centuries before, the master Poussin went to observe nature. Poussin's Walk ! Corot has painted the place with a visible adoration, which shows how even he, independent as he was, a painter who thought he went his own way in his art, was actually nourished by tradition. Let us admire these notes he has made and so definitely transcribed. How vivid the painter's sensation was. Everything which goes to make up the landscape is finely noted : every stroke of the brush bears witness to the pleasure of painting ; every touch is significant. On the distant slopes one could count the roofs of half-hidden farms which are suggested with liveliness and skill. The details are delicious ; every bush is painted with delight ; sensitive little touches, added one to another with a small brush on a very fine canvas. In imagination we follow Poussin in his walk. The eye is guided from light grey blues, to grey greens, and then to rich heavy ochres. One lingers over each detail of these modulated tones before passing on to new pleasure. This painting, beautiful in itself, also expresses a whole range of emotions. The two are inseparable ; the poetry springs naturally from the painting. Evening approaches ; one feels the silence of the countryside ; in the Roman Campagna nothing is heard but the sound of the river, which in the picture describes a splendid curve, through the superbly simplified foreground. No one detail however delightful, arrests one's attention. On this coloured canvas innumerable shades and differences combine to form a composition, which expresses a great thought. It gives both the pleasure that can be derived from a careful study,

and that which is only given by a painting. Corot gives to nature the freshness of the paint box and a unity of composition which can only be born in the isolation of the studio.

One of the most interesting pictures to study is the view of the *Trinité des Monts* from the Villa Médicis, for in it one can see most clearly Corot's method of painting. It is among the last of his works acquired by the Louvre, and is a precious acquisition. Some parts of the landscape are finished, others are not. Corot was not then painting as he did later, when, for instance, he produced the souvenir of *Castel Gandolfo*, a period during which, as we know, no one part of the canvas was treated more carefully than any other. Let us examine the parts of this *Trinité des Monts* which have no tbeen finished ; we shall see how he sets about his work. With colour so thin that it has run, he has quickly rubbed in the structure of the ground and the chief planes. The first stage is always this summary sketch, which is carried out in a light wash, always more or less mixed with white, and slightly lower in tone than the tone he wishes to get. The artist then goes over this underpainting, which is so transparent that the canvas shows through. Then, in its exact tone, he paints in each detail, one after the other. Through this the original layer appears, here and there, to support the design. Much later — it may be months afterwards — other touches will be added. One, one day, one, the next. So little is needed to make the subject come to life ! Corot, as we know, used to begin a picture by painting the sky : „ Once you've done the sky the best part of the job's done " he once said. In the sky of the *Trinité des Monts* which is of an enchanting delicacy, pale green and gold, nothing remains to be done, but in the foreground the drawing of the land is merely suggested. The eye always comes back to this very faint emerald-green and cobalt-blue cloud, which express by an effortless art the very freshness and charm of morning. Looking at this picture, of which some parts are

so sketchy, one feels with what pleasure the buildings are placed in the more finished portions. Think of the difficulty of expressing form in this delicate light which neither lends itself to strong oppositions nor emphasises any break in the contours. Corot makes use of the most delicate nuances. Certain walls have a milky quality : one scarcely knows if they receive the light or if it springs from them ; splendid lime-washed walls seen under an Italian sky. Other walls are treated in rich and tender wine colours. The glowing tones are restrained but still powerful, like flowers dimmed by the dew. One might, leaving aside the ensemble, follow in detail the placing of these exquisite tones so subtly put together.One may, and one does, take this pleasure. Then suddenly, when we have admired this sincere and loving work, (and so fresh remains his pigment that we might imagine that the subject is before us, and that Corot has just been painting it beside us) we are seized by the largeness of feeling of the whole. The light is smilling on these monuments, on this Roman horizon.

A lovely art which springs from unsparing toil ! Corot was to be a prodigious worker all his life. Sometimes he becomes discouraged. He wrote in March 1827, " Never take up painting if you wish to live quietly ". Again, he writes, " To-day we are flattered, we look upon ourselves as supreme geniuses (which proves that Corot had a just idea of his worth) ; to-morrow we blush for our works and are no good for any thing. " In other respects Corot was a serene artist. He quickly adds " One mustn't be affected by that. " He couldn't remain troubled for long ; there was no joy for him except in work : He always took life cheerfully. It was his happy destiny to enjoy the existence of a sage, contented with his lot, who every day rejoices in the beautiful light which has been given to

man. His loyal spirit, like his work, had a grand simplicity. A great workman or a great poet ? He is indeed both.

We shall not be able to follow Corot through his long working life. Try to imagine, however, his days in Italy when so many masterpieces came from his hands. If he were not so far from his good parents this life in Rome would be exquisite ; and in the summer, when he leaves Rome, what wonderful months again ! At one time be goes to Ariccia, then to Frascati, and to Tivoli. What joy to work in these places !

At Tivoli Corot likes to walk beside the splendid relics of antiquity in the coutryside, and beside the waterfalls : the gardens of Cardinal d'Este are magnificent ; they fall in terraces linked by flights of steps. Fountains and springs abound. Could one dream of a pleasanter place in which to work ? In the evening there are the excellent wines to drink and game is both cheap and abundant. At Albano is the best wine of the country ; all the great Roman lords had their vineyards there. At Tivoli, Moreau tells us, Corot stayed at the inn of the Sibyl, and at Parpigno, a village hanging above the olive groves, leads the same life of work and of amusement when the work is done. At Narni Corot paints the magnificent landscape, now to be seen in the Nélaton collection ; he delights to put beautiful greys, beautiful golds, beautiful blues on his canvas, until it resembles some wonderful enamel. What a difference there is between Corot's life in the Sabine Hills and the life of a Cezanne, who, before Sainte Victoire, suffers such torments for one joy ! At Frascati, it is not the splendid gardens of Prince Borghese that interest him, but waterfalls, the contours of mountains, the lines of old roofs. He makes little pictures of all this to delight the eye forever. Solidity and an astonishing balance between local colour and reflections are to be found in his work at this date. He paints almost as many masterpieces as canvases. This spot pours inspiration into him. Far off he can see Rome, over hedges

of myrtle and laurel. Better than the temples of love that Fragonard would have made into marvellous „ sanguines ", he prefers a humble village outlined against that divine horizon, the pure line of those hills, and the caress of that immemorial light. One gets the impression of the sea on the horizon.

After his visits to Rome and Tivoli, Corot proceeds to Naples. The beautiful *Vue du Vésuve* of the Nélaton collection is of this epoch. The smaller a Corot is the more it gains in compass. He takes a minute canvas, and makes it sustain a huge mountain, bathing its crest in the heavens. The colour glides over it, sparkling and brilliant ; the white of the canvas shows through and lightens the transparent grey of the clouds, and these clouds are of such delicate flowing colour — like mother-of-pearl upon sifted sunbeams. Is this work painted on paper ? Corot is known to have often used paper so as to lighten his tones by the extreme white of its surface. From Naples, he goes to Ischia. The delicious island inspires him as it had inspired Lamartine. But amongst the paintings of this period one returns again and again to this landscape of Vesuvius. The mountain is grey ; the cloud grey, but of another greyness. There are some stains of darker blue on the sea, and a white sail, so delicately painted that one would say the brush hardly touched the canvas in the painting. It is like a spray of almond-blossom when it falls in February on the shores of some beautiful bay. No other art, while rendering the solidity of things gives, at the same time, such an impression of immateriality.

Corot is right : he writes to a friend : „ When in Paris you see what I've done, you must tell me what you think about it. " Three years have passed. He returns, stopping at Assisi and Venice on the way. On the return journey, as on the outward journey he works unceasingly. By the spring of 1828 he has seen the sky of Paris once more, and the red house

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where Mme Roland lives, and his parents, Mme Corot, who sells millinery to the smart women of the world, and the pretty workgirls of the Rue du Bac. And he has breathed again the fragrance of the woods of Ville-d'Avray.

It is at Ville-d'Avray that he worships again his dear goddess Nature. There he paints the first canvas after the Italian tour : a path running down to a pond. Then he shuts himself up in his studio for the whole winter : he is at work on paintings that he will exhibit at the Salon — if they will be accepted, for, often, his work is refused. He can transcribe a site faithfully : he also surrounds it with poetry. Thus he reconstructs from memory a *Vue de la place Saint-Marc*. He says farewell again to his studio in the Spring. He hardly waits for the budding of the leaves, but when the apple blossom, like bridal bouquets, decorates the countryside, he greets the earth. In a valley that takes his fancy he sets up his easel, and when he grows tired of it, goes further afield. At Dunkirk, for one whole season, he makes studies of fishing-boats. Instead of the Roman sky, now it is the cloudy skies of Normandy. This apparent facility means constant application. He paints and re-paints, never sparing himself. He tries ceaselessly to approach nearer to truth : he is possessed by the need to be sincere.

The whole of this period, from 1828 to 1834, comprised between his first and second Italian tours, is passed in incessant work. At the studio, when he is not re-creating some path, deep-hidden in the grass, he is working hard at figure-studies. Turn by turn, his friends pose for him — Osmond, Clerambault Ratier's nephew, a shop-keeper, of the Rue du Richelieu, who measures off yards of material for his living. That Corot has studied David, these portraits which are so different from

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his later work, show clearly. They are strictly realistic and almost hard in outline. Although quite capable of showing the ugliness of a model, which is so often full of character, Corot was better pleased to paint the beauty of a woman's face. The drawing of a young girl — a member of the painter's family — is of 1830. It is like a beautiful sketch by Raphael. If Corot did not show himself to be, at Rome, an admirer of the grandiose composition of the *Ecole d'Athènes*, he yet knew how to look at a face by Raphael with profit. This drawing by Corot has even more of the perfect grace of that master than a drawing by Ingres. There is great beauty in the admirable oval of the face. It is one of the most delightful faces amongst the many that Corot has left us. And the surprising thing is that he had always at command any one of his different styles. This drawing is of 1830 : the *Dame en Bleu* of 1874.

Up to now we have seen Corot painting direct from Nature, and, in the studio, adhering strictly to his memory of the landscape. But he had already designed pictures, at Rome, composed according to the rules of classical composition, in which he endeavoured, while remaining faithful to the subject, to produce beautiful effects of light and shadow, and to emphasize the harmonious balance of the lines of a landscape. We have already spoken of the *Pont de Narni*, of the Nélaton collection, which is painted from nature ; but under the inspiration of the same subject Corot had painted, in the manner of Claude, a spot not less beautiful, which he modified to please himself. In this, he sought, by arranging imagined trees (non-existent in nature), by darkening shadows here, increasing the light there, to create a harmonious whole, imposed upon the theme, which conveyed, an impression of the

scene as well, if not better than a faithful study would have done. Thus the Corot whom the Impressionists were later to love so ardently was, in this phase, a disciple of the masters of the classical school. Nowhere better than in the magnificent painting of the *Route de Fontainebleau* can one find this intelligent mastery of the subject, and this sense of composition which allots to each element the part it must play in the whole. This road through the forest, these heavy trees, the woodcutters sawing down trees, this waggon at the ford — all this is not merely the ephemeral aspect of something that the painter immortalises by his art. The composition is the result of powerful mental effort : the artist has expressed the forest, and the idea of the forest. It is one of the great works of 1830. Unity of thought, grandiose inspiration, and a technique that shows that Corot had studied the old Masters are here combined. It is one of the greatest works of the painter and equal to this later masterpiece, the *Port de la Rochelle*. But where another would have seen only a formula to exploit, Corot is different. Nature, the dearly-beloved, calls him still. He had worked at Chartres, to which town, being a law-abiding citizen with no fancy for street battles, the revolution of 1830 had forced him to go. He works in Burgundy, in Nivernais. He paints the sky of Rouen. That of Italy beckons again. He returns in 1834.

He gained from his visits to Italy a feeling for nobility in composition : he found everywhere there the golden light that so sharply defines, and yet touches everything with poetry. If Corot had not travelled he could have been a painter of pretty rustic scenes — a Daubigny, perhaps — but in Italy he found the earth of Virgil, whom, as his notebooks show, he had never ceased to read. This time he will not go to Rome and to Castel Gandolfo, where he had left a fragrant memory behind him : the journey will be shorter. Do you wish for a thousand charming anecdotes ? Let us open Moreau —

although extracts cannot do justice to the tale. Corot sets out with his fried Grandjean — lover of the best wines and of all gaiety. They stop in Burgundy, wherever there is a famous vineyard. All along the route they leave the coach, cry a halt at Lyons, at Marseilles, and saunter along the coast. Corot paints and draws. At Genoa, he paints from the bottom of the town the Appenines on the horizon — the scene that Renoir found as beautiful as a Titian. At once he finds again the warmth, the grandeur, the sweetness he had known before in Italy, and transfers all this to canvas, combining delicacy with deliberate splendour. On the soil he loves, Corot, spiritual son of Claude, works with unerring certitude. At Pisa he makes studies from Orcagna and Giotto, which fact destroys the legend that he never went into museums. No doubt, he did not linger in them all day long, but whenever he went he hastened to the masterpieces. It is true that wherever he went he preferred to paint some beautiful scene, or even to enjoy himself, simply. He reminds me of Déodat de Severac, who adored Ingres' drawings, and yet, when with me at Montauban, did not want to visit the museum, preferring to watch the Tarn, (which is so like the Tiber) or to discuss the nature of hares. Such an amiable companion I imagine Corot to have been, following his fancy and happy in the pleasures that his eyes could give him. Such he is in Florence, painting in the Boboli gardens — and there are unforgettable cypresses silhouetted against the sky... In September he is in Venice, where he achieves the rich sketch, the *Piazzetta* of the Thomy-Thierry collection, so brilliantly caught and so true to life. In October, at last, he gets to Lombardy, to the Lakes. At Como he writes in his notebook, " beautiful country, beautiful trees, beautiful soil ". One is reminded of the pages in the *Chartreuse* : „ Sublime and gracious aspect, which the most famous spot in the world, the bay of Naples, does not surpass. " At Isola Bella the first haze

is on the foliage. On the lakes " everything speaks of love " said Stendhal — and the eyes of the Italian woman of whom the painter has left a seductive sketch, speak of passion. She does not hold him : he was never enslaved by his love affairs. On the contrary, what joy to suddenly remember a landscape ! Later there will be rustic concerts in the exquisite autum light that lingers over the lakes of Lombardy. A new Corot dates from this journey. This sunny vapour, these cloud movements, this water which is always to fascinate him — he sees all this poetry in 1834, but he cannot yet express it completely. There is solidity, in the construction of the admirable views of Volterra : this is a lesson Corot will never quite forget ; it will serve him well at a later period when his taste for fluid and imponderable nuances becomes almost monotonous. Look at these vigourous trees, the solidly constructed masses, the houses squarely planted on the soil. Corot has never been so resolutely a painter. The day is to come when his influence will be variously felt — least fortunately by those who wish to recapture his inimitable poetry. He who is nearest akin to the Corot of the Volterra period is Paul Cezanne, who draws solidly the trunks of pine trees rising out of the warm red earth. Nowhere else has Corot constructed his landscapes so firmly, or with such power. One can understand how, on his return in 1835, he wrote to a young painter : " Work well down there : draw firmly and truly. "

Corot is forty. He has created many masterpieces, the delicate harmony of which no other painter had hitherto attained. He combines subtlety and strength. Whatever he paints is significant. If it is a simple study one is always astonished by the surety of the placing on the canvas ; if it is a picture, by the compactness of the composition. In this

domain of poetry and painting, so closely akin that there is no real frontier between them, Corot has always something of the highest significance to tell us. If he chooses a theme it is with loving intelligence. Corot, painting always with deep thought, never allows himself to paint anything for its own sake, which is a method of painting that often gives great pleasure. Contrast with a Corot Manet's *Déjeuner Champêtre*, which contains some magnificent painting — such as the bread on the table cloth, the marvellous straw hat. Not a single corner of a canvas by Corot would give a similar pleasure — only a painter can fully understand this. But, on the other hand, what an eye for the whole. It is impossible to say here or there, it is admirabily painted : everything is designed to help the general effect and not with any concern for detail. Corot's art is truly French, that is, intelligent. Everything grows from thought, but begins in inspiration, which is translated into colour. ,, Always trust to instinct, to inspiration " he says. He came to that only by hard study.

The following extract from Corot's notebook has often been quoted : it is necessary to re-read it in order to understand the difficulties he, who was afterwards to find drawing mere child's play, had to overcome : he recalls his beginnings in Italy : ,, Two men were standing together. I drew them, in detail, beginning at their heads ; they separated and I found I had only two fragments noted on my paper... I made a resolution not to return home that day without a complete drawing, and I tried to draw by masses, to sketch rapidly, which is the only possible way. I set myself the task of taking in at one glance the first group that came. I got at least its general character. » At this stage, when Corot has already run through part of his career, it is very interesting to see with what humble difficulties he started. One sees what a hard struggle to obtain perfection he had — he who, later, with a single line, can suggest the mass of a wood, and then, with a piece of charcoal,

will create a dance of young goddesses in a glade, and so vividly can he suggest movement that his art here surpasses even the art of Carpeaux. He is a natural genius, but what a depth of thought was needed to attain this pitch of perfection. On the whole, what one admires in him is his constant application. He works and re-works on the same subject : " In general the regularly wellbuilt figure demands great integrity... Also, I see how important it is to be absolutely lifelike, and not content with sketches made hastily from nature. How often, when looking at my drawings, have I regretted that I hadn't the courage to spend another halfhour on each. " He says, also : " One can never study nature sufficiently. " His simple candour is admirable — but so is his application. The same man who said : " Trust yourself to inspiration " says also : " you go too quickly : your study is not sufficiently well-drawn. You won't succeed in that way. "

From 1835 to 1844 is another great period that Corot dedicates to the landscapes of France. He stays at Ville d'Avray and at Fontainebleau : he paints in Auvergne : and here he is in Avignon, cramming himself with " aioli ", drinking Chateauneuf and Tavel. On the banks of the Rhone there are subjects of the quality that had so pleased him in Italy. He expresses the nobility and purity of nature. Here are two views of this date — one, taken in the garden of the asylum shows magnificent cypresses reaching up into the beautiful sky. In the *View of Villeneuve*, the exquisite subject, the grey tones of the hillocks, the waters of the Rhone, recalls the first views of Italy and *La Promenade de Poussin*. Corot, at Avignon finds his inspiration again, to which is now added his highest gifts. The significance of a line becomes a miracle, so vividly does it express the contour of a hill against the sky.

On seeing these paintings again, one re-reads with interest the painter's note : " I recognised from experience that it is very useful to begin by drawing the picture very simply on white canvas, to have one's effect noted first on grey or white paper, then to do the picture bit by bit, as completely as possible at the first attempt so as to have only very little to do when the canvas is completely covered. I have noticed that everything that is done straight off is freer and pleasanter, and that one knew how to use happy accident in doing it : but when one re-paints, the first harmonious tone is often lost." This " first harmonious tone " is to be seen equally in the views of Tivoli as in those of Avignon. There is always the same acuteness of eye and the same delicate mental process behind it. The time has not yet come when many Corots will resemble other Corots too closely.

Yet the critics continued to be severe. What rubbish has been written on Corot, as on Delacroix : " He does not look at nature, he does not study her. " It did not trouble him much, nor did the constant refusal of his work by the Salon, nor the injustice of so many ignorant critics. It is true that a few had ventured on faint praise, but the time has not yet come when Theophile Silvestre and Baudelaire will pay him such remarkable hommage. He has not, as yet, sold anything, except to the Duke of Orleans, who also bought some Delacroixs. He continues, without being discouraged, his excursions through France. On the banks of the Lez, in Languedoc, Moreau retails, he once takes a rest, he fishes for eight days. Perhaps it was to study the water better, in the shade. At heart always he has only one passion : nature, and all his thoughts are bound up with memories of landscapes. He says " When I smell the hazel in Spring, my imagination flies

to Bois Guillaume, near Rouen, where my childhood was passed, and I bury myself in those fragrant thickets to which I used to go on Sundays to pick mushrooms ". Corot had the soul of an angler, or of a mushroom-gatherer, nourished on Theocritus. His heart was only peopled by nature memories : „ To return to my boyhood I only need a handful of leaves... " In the studio, the same smell of leaves haunted and inspired him. He repeats : „ Nature is eternal beauty. " sitting beside the stove, pipe in mouth, he sees the colour of clouds, meadow-flowers, buttercups in the fields in March, the colchicum in the last sunrays before the frosts in Autumn. He picks up a painting after leaving it alone for months and adds a detail which gives it its definite accent — as a word will give its real value to a stanza. The painting, which has been left for years with its face to the wall, is finished at last. And as the poet attributes to the muses the inspiration that comes after many night-watches, Corot thanks nature. He has noted : „ After my excursions, I invite nature to stay a few days with me — and then my mad fit begins : I hear birds singing, and trees shivering in the wind : I see streams and rivulets reflecting the sky, and all that is on their banks ; the sun rises and sets with me. "

Towards 1840 Corot shows a new phase. He exhibits that year a *Paysage au soleil couchant* and a *Berger Antique jouant de la Flûte auprès d'un Bois*. In 1841 he finishes a painting showing a dance of Italian shepherds, with a view of the Bay of Naples in the background. Similar scenes appear more and more frequently in his work. Regret for the exquisite hours he has known in Italy lives in his heart. A dream, enriched by memory, is mingled with reality. He longs to express the inner song he heard long ago, on the shores of the sea and of

the lakes — the alternated songs of Theocritus' shepherds.

As he attains his fiftieth year Italy is ever in his thoughts. The memory of his travels there occupies him more and more. Perhaps this inveterate old bachelor sometimes remembers the pretty woman that he knew there in his youth, and the beautiful limbs he caressed. I can see Corot, whose inner life of feeling is almost a mystery, some winter's evening by his stove. He has worked hard all day at a painting of a nymph bathing in a spring, which he saw long ago at Tivoli. He remembers his motto : " Good pictures are painted in the studio ". But this nymph recalls to him the arms he once knew. He smiles, too, thinking of the letters that he wrote to his friend Osmond, on his first journey : " Abel, never go to Bologna : it contains too many seductive sirens. I've let myself be seduced by the most fascinating ballerina of the Bologna Opera... I've a very pleasant memory of it... " This evening also the great painter remembers that he wrote at the same date : " You asked me for news of the Romans. They are the most beautiful women I ever knew. Eyes, shoulders, hands are superb. " And I imagine Corot, the same evening, evoking after his amorous Italian memories those of the time when he wrote from the forest of Fontainebleau. I set out for the forest very early. I come back late. I seek nature amongst the splendid oaks. I go to village feasts. (This reminds one of Gerard de Nerval and the delicious Sylvie) I leap with dryads, the hamadryads of the valley... I don't know what to do... I bury myself deep in the forest to hide my tears... I no longer meet these beautiful creatures. At least, I can find there the coolness to calm this ardour that devours me. " How far away all that seems, thinks Corot to-night. And he dreams also of the pretty work girl, forewoman at M^me^ Corot's, to whom he nearly vowed a much longer attachment. But neither she, perhaps the only one he truly loved, (at least, loved to the point that his parents became uneasy about the affair), nor

any other could hold him. He knew how, for the sake of his art, to resist all their charms and leave them... the pretty girls of Fontainebleau as well as the others. Soon he will also know how not to fear the beauty of the lovely Trasteverina, whom he painted nude on white linen, with a voluptuousness that recalls Ingres. How well he knew himself this man, who had written : " I have only one aim in life — to do landscapes : this strong resolution prevents me from becoming seriously attached to anyone. " Corot, sensitive Corot, was always clear-minded in everything. Italy, like the oaks of Fontainebleau reminded him, after one moment given over to dreaming of the voluptuous past, of nature's enchantment, where he had found only delight. He never ceased to dream of nature, " so splendid and austere ". In 1844 he could no longer resist the appeal : he must see his dear Italy again.

Not many details are known about the third journey to Italy ; but it is known that Corot drew with the same vigour, constant simplicity and charming candour. He works again at Tivoli and at Rome. He seeks to convey the volume of monuments : he surrounds them with light. His genius attains its full growth in a benign severity. Let us consider this admirable view of the *Villa d'Este* that can still be seen in the Rouart collection, before which Degas so often stops.

Nowhere else are cypresses so bathed in light : one imagines one might hear them as they rock in the warm mid-day wind. The houses of the town, seen through the villa railings, are ranged in an atmosphere that Corot has never rendered better. The far-off contour of the mountains dominates, with its beautiful line, the majestic horizon. Corot has painted all this with his mixture of grey tones shaded with gold and blue, and with the sweetness that is peculiarly his own — and, in

this particular case, with the nobility and naturalness that belong to the great French school of landscape painters. His pure and radiant genius approaches that of Lorrain : but, nevertheless, it is Corot's manner. On one hand he shows strength : on the other, he expresses the mystery of the hardly-born evening. The serenity that rises from the earth, the beauty of the olive trees at the hour when the young women return from the fountains at the foot of the villages, this peaceful smoke rising from the cottage, this Meditteranean limpidity, this air heavy with memories, what a magnificent conception ! but how beautifully it is painted, and in what divine colour ! Delacroix's *Women of Algiers* and Corot's *Villa d'Este* are the summits of the art of the nineteenth century. On the railings, in the foreground, a little Italian, wearing the " pifferaro " is seated. Exquisite form, in the lovely late afternoon light ! This little Italian is own brother to Melibeus.

All his life Corot loved Virgil's *Eclogues*. Even so far back as his days in the college at Rouen a line of the *Bucolics* suggested to him the charm of nature : he never forgot the sweetness of this early impression. He takes a Virgil always with him on his travels. At his inn he will read a few lines. He will remember, when painting the *Bergers de Sorrente* Tityrus and Corydon competing as to which sings sweetest, and the passage in the 5th Eclogue (which has never ceased to inspire painters) when he is at work on his magnificent *Silène*. In our own time K. X. Roussel paints under its inspiration. The *Georgics* also influence Corot : not the passages which describe the tasks of the seasons and the toils of the labourers, but the more tender verses : " Clear streams, I will go away : I will keep your sweetness secret ". In the morning, on his

way to work, when the pallor of the dawn is still astray in the sky, he remembers the poem : he repeats the lines when he returns at night. In this connection it is remarkable to see how profoundly Virgil's humanism has affected the two painters who are surpassingly great in their epoch. Cezanne, in the evening, when he has returned from Tholonet, turns round to see Sainte Victoire : innumerable lines of the poet return to his memory. But Corot has to such a degree, by his very nature, felt the Virgilian influence that it is almost unnecessary to indicate the relationship there is between many of his pictures, painted towards 1850, and certain verses of the poet : " The cool shadow of the night had barely left the sky... " Is it a painting by Corot, or a line by Virgil ? But Corot never strives to be literary. He is a painter whose mind is fed by myths. The fables he loves best are set in beautiful scenery. Perhaps he loved these myths so well because they reminded him of nature. Other poets have inspired him. He read Theocritus — one of the few poets he possessed. He was familiar with Daphnis and Chloe also, the Daphnis that Gœthe wished to see illustrated by Poussin. Corot painted the young shepherds hidden in the shadow of the branches. André Chénier inspired him too. The *Aveugle et les jeunes Bergers* of the Saint-Lo Museum comes direct from the reading of the poems Chénier had already taken from Virgil : *Il enchaînait de tout les semences fécondes*... Corot's *Aveugle* is as perfect as Chénier's. Corot's letter to his nephew is very interesting considered in connection with this admirable painting. " I forgot something yesterday : I intended asking for your little book of Chénier's poems. You would be very kind if you'd give it to your mother the first time you come out. I'll get it from her. Will you be with us on Sunday ? We might take a walk together in our beloved woods. " So, when Corot thought of reading the poem which was to inspire his *Aveugle et les Bergers*, he did not forget the smell of the wood, the glades, and the

moss-covered rocks. No other great artist of 1830, in this forest setting, would have painted *L'Aveugle*. Corot, with his spontaneous genius, knew how to arrange his composition just as he knew how to feel. One can never tire of admiring these magnificently drawn trees, the weight of the branches, the shadows from which they spring, and the listening glade through which the inspired voice of Homer sounds. The figures of the shepherds are carefully studied, and their attitudes admirably expressive of their surprise ; everything is well-placed in this composition, which is, without doubt, one of the most beautiful Corot ever painted. It belongs directly to Poussin ; he has known how to express pictorially the beauty of antique fables. This Saint-Lo canvas is characteristic of one of the highest forms of Corot's talent.

If I have purposely lingered over this painting it is because it contains a summing-up of Corot's art of composition. Had the painter himself any idea how much of tradition his art contained ? Corot, at times, was proud, believing that he owed nothing to anyone. Speaking of Delacroix he said : « Delacroix, in spite of his independence, lived on a few formulae that he learnt from Géricault and others. As for myself, no one has taught me anything. When one is left to oneself, face to face with nature, one does the best one can, and naturally, one invents one's own style. » Corot does not seem, therefore, to know what he himself owed to Poussin's lessons. This lesson is to be found in his *Silène*, as well as in *Diane surprise par Actéon*. No doubt, there are jottings in his notebooks which show that the painter seems to think he learnt all he knew from nature ; but there is also his work. Between the clear golden manner of his Italian paintings and the indefinite Mortefontaine period there is this purely clasical phase. *Agar dans le Désert*, *Saint Jérôme* and the *Démocrite* (painted in 1841) may be grouped under this period. They are strong and majestic compositions in which the science of painting

plays a much bigger part than in Corot's other work. Those who only love the Italian Corots will say that these works are too reminiscent of the studio, and those who are fascinated by his more cloudy manner will say they lack fluidity. But they can be admired for the sense of construction they show, and for the equilibrium with which so many diverse elements are held together. We arrive at another conception of his landscapes, or rather at another stage in the evolution of his art.

A landscape composed towards 1842 and painted entirely in the studio indicates already the more indefinite manner of his future compositions. In *Les Amours dans la prairie*, the Cupids playing on the edge of the wood are painted, like the whole scene, with the caressing softness that one can believe to have been inspired by Correggio. This would not be astonishing. Corot, who believed that he owed everything to direct study of the *motif*, had a list of masters in his notebook. The name of Correggio is amongst them. *Le Bain du Berger* (1848) is one of the works the most representative of the phase between the austere manner in which *L'Aveugle* is painted, and the mellow grace of scenes where his nymphs are soon to sport. This valley hollowed out between the trees, this half guessed-at haze and barely-accentuated softness presage a period when the painter, not yet enslaved by a new formula, is about to create works in which a new accent will be stressed. Perhaps the taste for music which is developing in him is connected with this way of interpreting nature. He was devoted to the compositions of Glück. We have seen how he transmuted the ideas of a poet : now his love of music, of poetry and of nature combine to colour his feelings. Sometimes, one cannot help regretting the solidity of *L'Aveugle*, of *Agar dans*

le Désert, of the Volterra paintings, and, above all, of the *Villa d'Este*.

We are about to see the formation of a manner which will be at its richest towards 1860. The *Eclogues* and the *Danses des Bergers* will become more and more numerous. These will be his winter's work. During the summer, the ever-youthful master, who is, by now, nearly sixty, can only be interested in nature. Listen to what he says : « One must go to the fields, not to pictures. I need the real branches. I want to know how the willow branches hang in the air... " He repeats his maxim : " Nature is eternally beautiful ". This love of direct study which he never abandons gives his sensitiveness the subtlety and delicacy that are always to be found in his canvases. There is nothing absolutely preconceived in Corot's work. One spring day, when the fields are impregnated with the penetrating smell of willow-blossom — one of the sweetest pleasures of country life — and in the newly awakened hum of bees, Corot conceives new works. He is a sensitiveness guided by intelligence. Palette in hand, in the open air, he gives himself up to the study of nature, just as, in the studio, he interprets his memories. He takes his pleasures where he finds them.

How many places he has still to visit ! Each spring finds him — he who cannot grow old — afoot. We see him at Arras, in Normandy, in Brittany. In 1850 he is at La Rochelle.

Among so many landscapes, the *Port de la Rochelle*, which he himself considered to be one of his best, is surely one of his principal works painted in France. Corot worked at it for more than twelve sittings of four hours each. However, the painter knew how to keep clear in his mind the idea with which he had started — obtaining always greater lightness and more acuteness and life as the result of patient toil. The old harbour, the basin and the towers are full in the light. Arrive one September afternoon in La Rochelle. Observe this ever-moving light which glides, undulates, quivers amongst

the clouds, like mother-of-pearl in movement. You are amazed at the truth of its rendering in the sky of the painting that you remember : it is just the sky that Fromentin describes so well in Dominique.

After La Rochelle, Corot visits Limousin, then Dauphiné, then Périgord. After the skies of France he wishes to see those of the North. He makes a journey to Antwerp where he admires the Rubens. A little later he will go to London where he will study the Rembrandts and Claude Lorrains. This journey seems to have turned him more and more towards the expression in painting of dawn and dusk, with a simplification of the construction of his landscapes, and an ever more conscious effort after decorative arrangement. Not in vain has he studied Rembrandt after Claude. He is now about to bring to light a golden splendour, the secret of which each of these masters. has had in turn, and to call forth from the canvas the perpetual life of light and shadow, and the poetry of the sun veiled in morning and evening mists.

The further Corot progresses in his work the stronger becomes his desire to capture the poetry of dawn and twilight. He particularly loves nature at the hour when her changing beauty is most mysterious. It is the quality of his feeling that makes exact classification of him as a painter so difficult. Through his sense of the grand and the noble he is related to Claude Lorrain, but he sees this poetry with eyes and a manner of feeling that are certainly of his own time. Corot is like an André Chénier : both the classic and the romantic schools have claimed him. One cannot label the poet any more exactly than the painter. No matter whether the painter aims at direct expression of the subject-matter, or whether he endeavours to describe an idea of a landscape, suppressing all

details so as to obtain the desired effect of a fairy-like luminosity, the thousand aspects of his genius can be explained by his extraordinary passion for the beauties of nature. But the actual sensation is always very strong. " Do you see the shepherdess leaning against the tree ? " he will say to his visitor. " See how quickly she turns round : it is because she hears a field mouse moving in the grass. "

As Corot enters upon a magnificent old age, his happiest dreams come from the impressions collected when he sets out before dawn to walk, pipe in hand, along the river-bank. Misty mornings. Already the ferryman poles the first peasant to the other side. In this light, are they peasants of gods ? Only the angler who is also a poet, remembering walks on the river-bank, when all the tints of dawn are caught and reflected in lovely broken colour in the waters, can understand how exquisite this hour is. Henceforth, water was to be Corot's great passion. It satisfies his taste for the subtlety of tones in movement, but it was to be a perpetual danger to his sense of form. Yet, how well he knows how to convey the character of these misty hours !

Have you ever set out like this on a September morning ? Something is faintly stirring in the sky : the fisherman is already sculling his boat along ; he prepares to throw the net. An old ruined bridge can be seen rising out of the willows. One dreams of sitting under the branches and letting this hour and other hours pass : of being alone there. A willow, silvered by the grey of morning, lightens with its radiance against the scarcely darker background a Corot landscape, one such as he would make of a similar scene. Through the foliage the landscape is just about to appear : one sees it : the mists move : squirrels chase each other. Soon the countryside will swelter in the heat. But now, there is only the coolness in which the voices of nymphs can be heard. This is the scene that Corot has painted once, twice, a hundred times, and oftener than

might be believed without repeating himself : he enriches this subject by his interpretation of it, by the figures that symbolise his feelings. He is always a painter. No artist before him succeeded in getting just the silver of his tones, nor has any been able to recapture it since.

He no longer wishes to describe such and such a spot, but to express some great conception that transcends the scene. His pictures will now be called *Dawn, Solitude.* By distributing effects of light and shade, and by an arrangement of the lines of a composition, he expresses the lyric feeling he has for nature. By this he differs from his contemporaries : he will also differ from the impressionists. Fundamentally, paradoxical as it sounds, Corot could have played a part in the evolution of a Puvis de Chavannes. *Inspiration,* a charcoal sketch by him of a woman standing under a tree, might almost be a drawing by Puvis. The woods he paints are sacred woods. He no longer studies direct from nature, as in the *Villa d'Este* and the *Port de la Rochelle,* but combines more subtle and fluid scenes into a harmony of lines, which is slightly modified according to the needs of the design. Almost always there are figures. In certain paintings young girls enjoy a rustic concert : in others, children play „ ring o'roses " round the brillant beech-trunks : in yet another, a shepherd plays his flute to Pan. Sometime or other, during a period stretching over many years, all these pictures have been studied in drawings, ceaselessly altered, and worked at over and over again. There is a note in Corot's writing : " What a beautiful picture one would make by taking a very simple foreground and doing away with a few tree tops ". It is not a few tree-tops he suppresses, but entire trees ; yet, in spite of modifications it is always an actual spot that he paints. His memory of land-

scapes, and especially of those from which he had worked, was astonishing. He himself says : „ I will paint a picture after one study, but if really necessary, I can do without even that... I keep in my eyes and in my heart a copy of all my works. " It is this copy that he interprets, but with great faithfulness.

No doubt Corot's *Vue de Tivoli* manner is preferable to his others, but, nevertheless, the *Danse des Nymphes*, now at the Louvre, repays examination. In it, Corot, in his tender way, incorporates feelings that painting had never expressed before. These alders and these aspen trees that stand out from the vapours of dawn : this composition of shadows which are no longer shadows, of light that is no longer light : this glade where the young apparitions dance : these tones, which would be insipid in any other painter, but here exist in an imponderable atmosphere : out of these elements is woven the spell that only a Corot painting can exert.

If the painting is examined for any length of time, one observes, after having enjoyed the harmonious design, that pure colour has not been used at all. Technical mannerism is a rather misleading phrase to use in connection with Corot, but what is it ? Thirty years ago, at Rome, he studied these trees. He never forgot any scene. If it lives again in the artist's memory, it is invested with this half-imaginary, half-real atmosphere with which he automatically endowed any place he loved. He has re-drawn the painting in charcoal. Here, it might be noted, that about 1853 we more often find charcoal sketches for large paintings. It is a far cry from these to his first blacklead drawings. There are no outlines in these studies ; before, at Rome, he only drew by outline. Of these splashes, willow boughs, water and trembling reeds will be born. Having thus established values he transfers them to canvas in broken

tints of yellow ochre, and on this foundation scatters his tones. The following passage in his notebook dates from this time : " I am never in a hurry to fill in the details : the broad masses and the general character of a painting is what interests me. When these are well-established I try to find subtleties of shapes and colours. I go over the canvas time and time again, not being stopped by anything, and without any definite system... " It is true that Corot works on no definite system. One by one he gives the faint touches which are to become the delicate rose colours, the tender golds of dawn, the blue-greys, the faint greens. It is worthy of note that he very seldom uses any colour without white. Th. Sylvestre writes, referring to his method : " The painter first does the sky : then the principal masses that stand out from the whole : after this he looks for the combinations of things reflected in the water. Lastly he fills in the foreground in such a way that the objects seem to be alive, and to be coming, one after the other, from the depths of the canvas. Sometimes he works less regularly, studying all at once — form, colour, movement... and takes in carefully every part of the picture at every stroke he makes, so as to be sure that it is exactly right and in keeping with the rest. " It is obvious how different Corot's manner is at this period from the way he worked in Rome in 1828. The painter, at each stage of his career, found the pictorial method corresponding to what he wished to do. He was an empiricist, opposed to all preconceived ideas. We have seen how he painted a picture, bit by bit. Now he paints the whole. Indeed, Corot cannot teach anyone the art of painting. He used so many different methods. Between the *Vues de Volterra*, and *Castel Gandolfo* and that divine picture in which is imprisoned the eternal poetry of dawn — the *Souvenir de Mortefontaine*, there is nothing in common but the presence of genius.

The poetical manner that fascinated Corot between 1860 and 1870 led to a great deal of repetition in his work. Notwithstanding his peculiar gift for expressing — and with such gusto — the beauty of colour and tone values, he now seems, in too many of his paintings to deviate from the fine manner of his Italian period, the manner of the *Pont de Narni*, and of the *Villa d'Este*. He is getting too far away from true effects studied from life. He is far away, too from the style of the *Village dans le Morvan*, now in the Louvre, where on a grey winter's day one may see the corn swaying before the cottages. Then, what solidity, firmness of impasto, splendid technique. Now, there is great facility and many similar effects — morning mists, twilights, cloud reflections in water. Soon shapes disappear altogether, the method of painting has become rapid, and the mystery of feeling is expressed by too obvious tricks. We feel how these pictures are made — dark tones, then faint shading lines of vague colour. It is true, the feeling is noble : but a mere charcoal sketch would give it : the execution adds nothing. Corot, here, makes one think of Carrière. The great mind is still there, no doubt, but what an improverished manner : the painting seems hollow ! It is Rembrandt, without his richness of colour imposed and superimposed, without the solid foundation of the *Bethsabée*. What is missing from numerous works by Corot about 1865 is the splendid subject-matter of the hundred Italian masterpieces. This lack can be felt only too evidently in l'*Etoile du Soir* of the Toulouse museum. It is even more flagrant in *Orphée et Eurydice*. The innumerable dawns at Ville-d'Avray become insupportable. One thinks, regretfully, of the *Vue de la Forêt de Fontainebleau* of 1830, with its well-designed tree-trunks, its solidly-built up planes.

It must be confessed : by 1860 success had come at last. Corot sells, and to help an unfortunate friend, to be able to exercise his inexhaustible charity, he dashes off hasty sketches which buyers quarrel over. These are to be seen everywhere. The Chauchard collection has splendid works by Millet and a pretty series by Corot ; but, nevertheless, many of these ponds encircled by reeds are second-rate works, showing neither a strong re-action to nature, nor the essence of Corot's poetry. Let us quickly return to the *Vues d'Italie*, to *Le Vallon*, to *Le Village dans le Morvan* — to see firm compact painting... landscapes and figures by Corot.

Corot wished to be a landscape-painter, yet did very few paintings from which the figure is entirely absent. Near this group of willows he puts the bent reapers cutting the wet hay. In the lake, under over-hanging branches, is the gleam of white-fleshed bathers. Elsewhere it may be peasants gossiping together by the farm, or even a gleaner near a pond, or a woman carrying faggots. To nearly all his canvases he gives this touch of life by introducing somewhere the human figure — unless they should be gracious pastoral divinities.

From that to making figures more important than nature is only one step. Corot has taken it. The figure, even, plays a predominant role, and sometimes appears as the nude body of a graceful goddess lying in meadow-grass. One must admire this *Bacchante* — delicious young woman — stretched indolently before a landscape. One could say that the landscape and the charming beauty are not very well joined together, but the figure is „ of alabaster and of snow ", as André Chénier would have said, and the arms are pretty, the feet delicate. I do not find that the model poses a little too obviously, as Gustave Geffroy holds. The flesh is dazzling, mar-

vellously seductive. This same Corot who has just been seen painting too rapidly too many canvases, shows how soon his genius re-asserts itself when he sets about expressing this nudity. Coreggio's name comes again to mind. One even thinks of Giorgione's dusky Venus, who reclines, also, in a pastoral scene. The Venus rising from cloudy vapours in the *Venus au Bain* has the same qualities, and in *Venus qui emprisonne l'Amour* they are also to be found. Corot makes one think of Correggio and of Prudh'on. It is true that the models who pose for him are indeed of the epoch at which we have arrived-the Second Empire. Possibly his *Bacchante* has already posed for Carpeaux. But Carpeaux, with all his delicious talent often committed plastic errors. Corot paints a graceful nymph reclining in the open or another recalling Love : his art is the art of the painter. The qualities which begin to be lacking in the landscape are to be found again in these beautiful graceful figures. There is never a crude touch, but a high degree of solidity and subtleness. These qualities will be found again in the *Toilette*, where the attractive body gives such complete satisfaction. The torso is at the same time exquisitely modelled and very luminous: the breasts are rich and pure in form. One arm is raised over the head : the other supports it : the arrangement of the limbs is especially pleasing.

The figures we have been describing belong to the years between 1860 and 1870. They have been chosen to show that the weaknesses to be seen in the landscapes of this period are made up for by the perfection of the nude figures they contain : but from the start Corot had painted nudes. We have of his a *Nymphe de la Seine* (1837) asleep on a grassy bank, and there is also the *Odalisque romaine*, done on the third visit to Italy in 1843. It was one of his works that Corot liked

best. The body is solidly built up, the drawing resolute : traces of David's influence can be found. Ingres or, even Degas might sign this *Odalisque romaine*. Corot's diversity is indeed astonishing.

When quite young he had painted in this same acute spirit a portrait of the old nurse Fanchette, who refused to look at it : " Monsieur, you've made me look like an old applewoman... " Corot had done many other little portraits, very realistic in character. We have spoken of those of Osmond and Clerambault. Working with considerable harshness he made, at this time, a quantity of almost cruel likenesses. He was then drawing with the hard pencil which he used for landscape studies. The implacable analysis which he applied to portrait painting he preserved at a period when his landscapes were much softer in tone. From this point of view one of his most curious works is the portrait of his mother, M^me^ Corot. This is another figure that might have been painted by David. Wrinkles are not spared : the mouth, which one feels to be toothless, creates hollows in the cheeks, The dress is blue : the lace bonnet has pink ribbons : at the neck there is a purple ribbon, with a gold brooch : the gloves are yellow. Only a David or a Goya would have painted thus the ornamented decrepitude of an old decayed beauty. This, then, is what has become of M^me^ Corot, the pretty milliner of the Rue du Bac, always so anxious to be elegant, who is the last survivor of many young women, friends of Josephine de Beauharnais, who came to the famous shop to seek fashionable headdresses and Directoire novelties ! Corot's complete tenderness was reserved for nature : of her, he only painted the beauty. Look again at the portrait of the bride in the Nélaton collection : fat, gross wench, dressed in white, with a veil. No doubt this realistic phase was not lasting. Later he will only want to express the charm of life by his figures. All his models will then be very young and ren-

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dered in harmonies of tone that are full of charm, in an atmosphere that is both exquisite and discreet. The first sign of this appears in the portrait of his niece, M^lle Charmois. He shows her pretty face, black hair, winsome eyes. The dress is white, contrasting with her black mittens : the bonnet white, trimmed with blue. The painting stands out as a little marvel in this series of portraits of nephews, nieces and friends of the painter. He catches a likeness with faithful sincerity. The artist wishes to hand on lasting memories. It is no bad method of leaving works of beauty, if added to it is this naive application (constant with Corot) to each day's work.

It would be a lengthy task to enumerate all the figures painted by Corot from his youth to 1870, when in his old age, some of his most ravishing studies were done. It is known that although he exhibited his landscapes he kept his figure-paintings jealously hung up, or even turned face to the wall, in his studio — this studio which had no other article of furniture than the cast-iron stove, near which so many masterpieces had been created. For a long time a self-portrait of the artist, dating from 1835, hung there. It shows the painter's beautiful head as he approaches maturity. Corot's little cap shades his eyes from the bright light. The left side of the face is in shadow : the chin is heavy and prominent. Authority and sweetness mingle in his glance. He is in a bright, white smock and holds the palette in one hand, and the brush in the other. This painting is in the Uffizzi Gallery. The execution is accomplished and the composition has the solidity of a Lenain. In many others of his figure-paintings it is Vermeer who is brought to mind.

In his last period he only works from models in his studio which he invests with the colour that sets the tone for the

whole composition. He had made many studies in Rome. In 1822 he had been painting landscapes that he never surpassed later, but it was far otherwise with his figures. Here his talent was the late-ripened fruit of a long Indian summer. Corot was already quite old when he achieved his most lovely faces. One knows that he secretly loved them. " The Italian women of the rue Mouffetard ", says Moreau, " alternate as models with the light o'loves of the Montmartre studios ". He adds : " His models might move and he did not rebuke them. The frequenters of the studio took their ease there, so much so that the little Daubigny, becoming familiar in the long-run, chattered, laughed and sang, and would not keep still. And when someone criticised this offhandedness to him he said " But it is just all this movement that I like about her. I'm not one of those who specialise in this or that part of a body. My aim is to express life : I must have a model who moves , ".

Life — that is what Corot wished his figures to express, but with an art full of shades and differences. He worked from his models with keen pleasure and concentration. It is indeed the same painter who has noted all the subtleties of tone of the olive trees of the Villa d'Este, and the intangible elusiveness of evenings at Tivoli. In the least figure-study by him, in the charming texture of these young women's faces, one can guess the joy it gave him to paint them. Study the *Femme à la Toque*, a half-length of a woman holding a mandoline. The face has a regularity and a nobility worthy of a face by Raphael : the hands are treated with a softness of modelling that resembles a caress. This is of 1850, the year when the painter signed the marvellous *Port de la Rochelle*. From 1850 to 1874, when was painted the *Dame en Bleu* of the Louvre, which Degas rated so highly, is a succession of exquisite works. He will make a charming painting of a model, seated on a chair in the studio, with the light behind her, looking at a canvas. His inspiration is not infinitely varied but the technique is

most accomplished. A woman who one guesses to be very beautiful, although she is in the shadow, holds a musical instrument in one hand and rests the other on an easel. The dress is carefully studied, its folds elaborately drawn against a harmonious background. The plump shoulders, leaning forward, are caught by the light. The interplay of light and dark tones is in fautless harmony. The hair is of a beautiful black. If Corot ever painted for the pleasure of painting it is in this study of an interior. It is a fascinating subject. One must admire the whiteness of this back and by what insensible degrees the shadow surrounds the guessed-at face. Almost all the studio-studies of this time would give us similar pleasure. Of a head, which may be quite commonplace in itself, Corot produces a marvel by a scientific observation of values, by the subtle arrangement of the light, by his sweet and exquisite power.

Corot once said : „ I paint a woman's bosom just as I paint a common milk-bottle ". Is it quite true ? This old Corot passionately admired women's beauty, and continues to do so even now when he is seventy years old : he goes to the theatre and enjoys the ballet, he frequents the Opéra-Comique as much to admire the women's dress, their splendid shoulders, their arms on the edge of the box, as to hear Glück's music. He is still green and robust, and knows as well how to enjoy life as heretofore at Rome and Tivoli : no doubt, even now, he has more than one young mistress : but nothing is allowed to take precedence of painting. Never has he painted grey and silver tones more joyously ; the delight he found in other days in Italy in ranging cypresses against a beautiful sky he finds now when he delineates, with sure touch, these faces, dresses and interiors. He is less lyrical and grandiose, but more

resolutely a painter than in the period when he achieved so many Dawns and Sunsets. His figures remind one of both Vermeer and Chardin. One cannot doubt it when looking on these two young Breton women. A brilliant blue kettledrum, a rich velvety peach, the head of a child playing a teetotum are the means by which Chardin conveys life, but they are also pretexts for pure painting. By means of a dish disposed just so, and a milk-bottle one can express marvels and dazzle the spectator. Thus „ le père Corot " working in his studio at these studies showed them to no one. He was now painting for painting's sake, as perhaps he had never done as yet in all his long life of work, except in Italy. Examine one of his beautiful canvases : *La Lecture*. How vividly we can feel the young girl reading, but how beautifully the tone values are realised in the whole work : how the white sleeve stands out on the black bodice ! Is it because of such qualities, which reveal the merits of pure painting that Corot, the figure-painter, is now sometimes ranked above Corot the landscape painter ? These are puerile queries. *La Femme à la Perle* is a masterpiece ; but how about the *Port de la Rochelle*, with its red houses that Renoir admired so much, and the *Villa d'Este* ? In the Salle des États one can go from the *Danse des Nymphs* to the *Femme à la Perle*. Why should we spoil our pleasure for the sake of making comparisons ? In the figure painting one can go on admiring the harmony of dim blues, of lights yellows in the dress, the pure drawing of the face, of the mouth, of the line of the hands. This thoughtful perfection is full of a beautiful mystery that recalls da Vinci. Better still, it makes one think of Prud'hon.

Corot is now seventy-four. How many Governments, how many different parties has he seen collapse around him ! His

mother, the beautiful milliner is long dead, as is also his father, who never believed in his son's talent. On the day that Camille was decorated did he not believe that the decoration was for him, the captain of the National Guard ? But all the same, affectionate Camille never ceased to adore him. He kept the Ville-d'Avray house jointly with his sister and always returned there to work and to spend part of the summer. By now, Corot has seen the war of '70, and the collapse at Sedan. These formidable events do not reach this delightful old man, the nature painter. In evoking the river-banks in Autumn he forgets the ugliness of life, and again in painting his adorable figures. The tints of the sky, the beauty of a woman's flesh — these are the things that do not perish. If Corot had only painted nature he would be a genius in whom one would not feel an epoch live. But the feminine figures, the costumes of his models — such as the *Dame en Bleu*, who is dressed like a woman by Renoir — make him of his time. For the matter of that, some few faces by Corot, some few figures by Renoir, who so loved Corot, make up the most delicious product of French art in the period of the end of the Second Empire — which lasts until about 1875. Corot, Renoir, Carpeaux have recorded the characteristic feminine grace of their time.

Corot wished to be a landscape painter. This was his first and last ambition. During the siege of Paris he again paints nymphs. The money he earns is spent at once. What a joy for such a sensitive heart to help some unfortunate. After the siege he goes into the country again. Every year he joins his faithful friends, the Robaults, at Arras ; it is his second home, where he is happy to live. Old Corot, as in his young days at Tivoli, still takes his part in the family concert in the evenings. In the daytime he paints with his intimate friend Dutilleux, Robaults' son-in-law. He is still given to contemplation. July nights in the country are intoxicationg to him. He admires „ the rain of stars ", and is as happy as ever when

he sets down his easel in the chosen spot. In 1871 he is working at Douai, and writes jokingly : " I' ve just put the last touch to the belfry of Douai : splendid work ! " The old man was right : it is a splendid work. Go to the Thomy-Thierry Collection to see it : it is one of his most beautiful paintings. The marvellous old man, already in sight of death, returns to his " grand manner ". The *Belfroi de Douai* can hold its own with the *Port de la Rochelle* and the *Vues d'Avignon*. There are the grey and yellow houses ; the eternally young light plays upon the old stones ; the smudges of old shops, this charming old-fashioned air, the geranium at the tower window, the roofs, the delightful provincial street — it is another poem the painter dedicates to light. He has lost none of his qualities : the careful drawing, the beautiful composition, the delicate atmosphere are all here, and the sky which makes one with the monuments sums up the whole art of the painter, his acuteness and his style.

It is a beautiful end to a beautiful life. Nothing could destroy the optimism of the artist. No doubt, feeling that the end must soon arrive, he reads Epictetus and the *Imitation of Christ*, but for him, each day has its new task. Robault quotes the following words of his which Moreau has preserved : " When one has done two or three mediocre studies the good one which is finally turned out is all the better for this apparently sterile work — although one would hardly think so. " He sets out again : at seventy-six he is painting at Fontarbia. He writes : " Do you see the vividness of these greens ? I' ve never got that before. A workman must work to the very end. " He studies without ceasing the tone values of a landscape, takes notes, works as if he had all to learn. He can say of himself, with legitimate pride : „ It is easier to find an original note than to persevere. " He, Corot, will persevere : he always unites his technique and his intuition. To the end he is the enemy of dogmatism. " Yes, I use white with all my colours ",

he says : „ but I don't do it on principal. " His belief in the value of instinct is admirable : but it can only be had by those who have worked hard and are moderate in everything.

The great painter's end was worthy of his life. On his bed he is still painting. Let us quote his words as recorded by Moreau : „ It seems to me that I have never known how to do a sky. That before me is much pinker, deeper, more transparent. — Ah ! how I would like to show you those immense horizons ! " Remember that Corot was a draper's clerk : rue Saint-Honoré : he painted landscapes : he painted them until he was seventy-eight. Corot, born in Paris, adorer of Virgil and Glück was a peasant. Each morning he breakfasted off porridge, on awaking. This morning, we are told by his excellent biographer, he said : „ It is no use to-day : „ le père Corot " breakfasts above. " The old man found death natural. Perhaps he smiled at it as he had smiled at nature. He had known how to live delightfully. All pleasures must come to an end. Corot had had a long life and a wise one. He died in 1875.

To gauge Corot's true greatness we must pay a last visit to the Louvre. Let us look at the *Jardin Farnèse*, and the *Pont de Narni*, which is one of his most beautiful works. Is not this painted in the most perfect of his many styles ? The picture shows the entrance to the valley and the great blue plain. Any other painter would have accentuated the perspective and made a great hole in the middle of his picture : Corot's texture binds the whole thing together, even to the farthest horizon. The composition moves rythmically from foreground to background, and nor by starts and bounds. Corot never painted more significantly, not with such rich material. It is the composition of a Corot that makes his paintings so beautiful. It is exquisite and solid. Cezanne seems

to have studied it. But here is the *Vallon* of the Thomy-Thierry collection. Admire this coombe where one can almost feel the springiness of the grass, the firmness of the earth, and, further on, this masterpiece of his old age, the *Beffroi de Douai*. Let us go to see the *Nymphs* dancing to the dawn : let us enjoy the regard, the oval of the face, the hands of the *Dame à la Perle*. Over there is the *Souvenir de Mortefontaine*, and not far from it the *Dame en Bleu*, leaning pensively on the black varnished piano : admire her delicate arms and the marvellously painted folds, and the colour of her dress. Let us look at others still. Such a variety of work would be sufficient to glorify anyone — but this is only a part of Corot's whole. There are styles that are not represented at the Louvre, such as the compositions of 1830, in which the painter, in his reconstructions of scenes of antiquity proves himself of Poussin's lineage : the *Cavalier sur une Route montante*, which is like an Italian primitive, comes to mind also, and finally, there is this divine *Concert*, which is so like a Correggio.

When this tour of the painter's work has been made, and one has passed from a canvas of 1822 to one of 1875, that which is most striking is the quality of the serene grandeur which animates it. It is everywhere. There is a confirmation of this impression in something Delacroix has written on him. Here, it is useful to point out, that two such lyricists as Delacroix and Corot were, could not possibly understand each other at the first encounter. It was only long afterwards that they admired each other's work. The passage in Delacroix is noteworthy : it shows his intelligence and brings out the very essence of Corot. " His great baptism of Christ (now in St. Nicholas du Chardonet) is full of naive beauties ; his trees are superb. I had spoken to him of the tree that I wished to put into *Orphée*. He advised me to let myself go a little and have confidence in what would come (this is a confirmation of Corot's belief in inspiration). He did this the greater part of

the time. He did not admit that beauty could be created just by taking infinite trouble. Titian, Raphael, Rubens brought off their successes with a certain ease. Notwithstanding this facility there is always a certain amount of preliminary work to be done. Corot himself goes into every subject deeply. " Since we know Delacroix's views on Corot, let us note that Corot admired him more and more, and often said to his intimate friends : " He is a wonderful man. "

" There is in his work ", Baudelaire wrote in 1859, " an infallible exactness of harmony, and a profound feeling for construction. His colour only appears too mild and his light too crepuscular in contrast to the clamorous paintings that are hung near. " It was not the first time that Baudelaire praised his colour. " Corot's composition is perfect. Thus in *Homère et les Bergers* nothing is useless : nothing should be suppressed — not even the two little figures talking on the path. The three little shepherds with their dog are delightful — like the fragments of excellent bas-reliefs that are found on some pedestals. " And this sense of composition that Baudelaire appreciated so highly is to be found in all his paintings. Take as an example the *Pont de Limay* (1872) and attempt to blot out the poplars on the left with their shadows which throw into relief all the values on the right ; or again try to take away the islands of willow, the mill and on the other side, the village where the early light makes the dew sparkle on the roofs and brings out the quality of the sky when the dawn is breaking. Such a marvellous poem it is, such subtle and delicate painting where the form itself is colour. It is there that Renoir learnt his art. He was, amongst the innovators, one of those who best understood these paintings, where light is born and perpetually renews itself. The *Pont de Limay* is an ode to the sun which is reborn to the tender beauty of the morning, to the loveliness of summer on the earth. Well might Renoir say, in looking at this landscape : " Only Lorrain, Corot

and Cezanne could have painted it." Corot had attained the point of perfect equilibrium where tradition opens the door to innovators, where the innovators find the true value of classicism. But what exquisite classicism!

This manner of composition, and also this poetry, show where Corot differs from the landscapists of Barbizon. Such a thing as mythology does not exist for Rousseau. He is a sort of Ruysdael of the nineteenth century. He paints great atmospheric movements, harsh mountains, pools under a stormy sky, the forest stripped by winter, or in autumn, with its oaks gilded by November frosts. Compare his road through the forest of Fontainebleau with Corot's. The weather is dark and heavy: suddenly the sky lights up, and the light bursts dramatically into a damp glade where the last leaves are whirling. Rousseau is, when all's said and done, purely a man of the nineteenth century; a meditator, alone before nature, who sees the earth without gods, who feels the eternal flux of things. In his painting everything is born, everything dies. There is a powerful pantheism in his art. He loves the silence of woods, the sad moors where cattle graze near the marshes. Under these eternal oaks, with their firmly constructed branches one feels that human life is transitory. What a difference between Corot and Millet. The former painted delightful eclogues: the latter sombre bucolics. Corot is only superficially interested in the peasants' labours. It is certain that the magnificence of the soil newly-turned when October is over escaped him, and also the splendid gestures of the sower, who, from morn to evening, tramps his fields with measured steps and throws the seeds from his open hand. Millet's peasant goes home at once, and eats his soup by the fireside, with his wife and children. His least gestures are humble and sacred. When Corot paints a church, it is a church in the light, surrounded by beautiful trees. But here is a stone church by Millet: one thinks of those who were baptised there, of those for whom the

Dies Iræ has sounded and who sleep near by. What gravity ! For Millet, man gains his bread by the sweat of his brow : the woodman with his axe in his hand ; the peasant struggling against the earth, against death. His sombre figures, painted with black and gold, are grander than nature. Millet is a realist and a romantic : this great Norman recalls to mind another great Norman, D'Aurevilly. And Courbet ? His trees, when compared with Corot's seem built with the trowel. A heavy icy shadow glides at the foot of the granite walls where the torrent flows. Under these heavy, superbly-painted, trees, if there is a nude at all it will be a stolid and corpulent peasant woman.

M. Paul Jamot has published a valuable study in which he points out the difference between Corot and the landscape painters of 1830. " Corot ", he says, " never ceased to believe that one of the most beautiful themes offered to a painter was to construct a harmony of trees, of the colour of the sky and the play of light, with a poetical legend, or simply, with graceful figures, dancing or meditating. " M. Janot shows very clearly how Corot is related to Poussin and Claude Lorrain. Like them he knew how to combine figures and lanscapes.

Can it be said that Corot is equal to Poussin ? No, because Corot never had the formal grandeur, the rich pictorial matter, the astonishing technique drawn from the fountain-head from Raphael and Titian. Poussin knew everything about technique : he relied upon a science such as no painter of the nineteenth century has possessed. Corot had the dangerous privilege of teaching himself direct from nature, and then carrying his spoils to his studio and making them into pictures as best he could. He has experienced the solitariness of the great nineteenth century lyricists. It is true that he found his happiness in this. Might Corot and Claude be compared ? Lorrain's genius, shown in his painting and in his extraordinary drawing, is the incomparable point of perfection to which

the art of French landscape painting has attained. Poussin and Lorrain are as gods who paint. If Corot has not painted as a god, yet he often does so as a mortal inspired by gods. He has expressed the harmony of nature : he has added to the poetry with which the days of man is consoled. The painting in which young girls are playing musical instruments in a wood makes one understand how he adored Mozart. And yet, this colour-musician, this poet is even greater because he was a true painter : he is the equal of Vermeer, and of Chardin.

To recall Poussin, Lorrain, Vermeer, Theocritus, Virgil, Glück, Mozart — who is the painter of the nineteenth century, excepting Delacroix (who himself recalls Rubens, Veronese, Shakespeare, Dante, Byron) that could make one think of so many men of genius ? What is curious is that Corot who had nothing of the intellectual about him succeeds by spontaneous art in expressing the mystery and light of nature. How natural he was ! The muses have re-paid him. They have given an enduring reward to his sincerity.

Am I right or wrong in comparing him to La Fontaine ?

Coláiste Oideachais Mhuire Gan Smal
Luimneach

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COROT A SON CHEVALET

Corot at his easel.
Corot an seiner Staffelei.
Corot al cavaletto.
Corot al caballete.

PEINT A FONTAINEBLEAU

Painted at Fontainebleau.
In Fontainebleau gemalt.
Dipinto in Fontainebleau.
Pintado en Fontainebleau.

LE COLISEE

Coliseum.
Das Colosseum.

Il Colosseo
El Coliseo

VUE DE ROME

View of Rome.
Ansicht aus Rom.

Veduta di Roma.
Vista de Roma.

LE PONT DE NARNI

Narni Bridge.
Die Brücke von Narni.

Il ponte di Narni.
El puente de Narni.

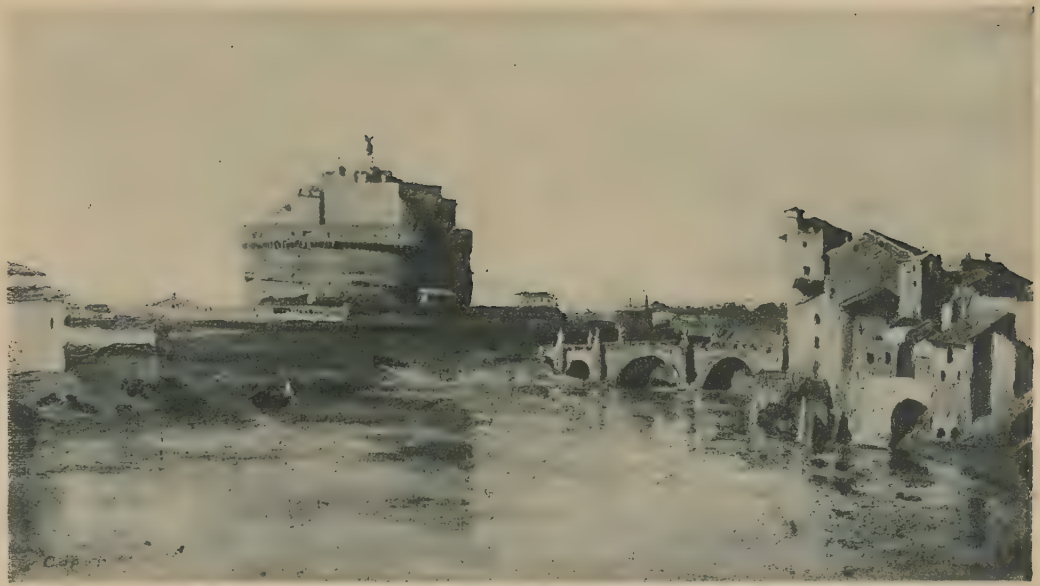
LA TRINITÉ DES MONTS

La Trinita dei Monti.
La Trinita dei Monti.

La Trinità dei Monti.
La Trinidad de los Montes.

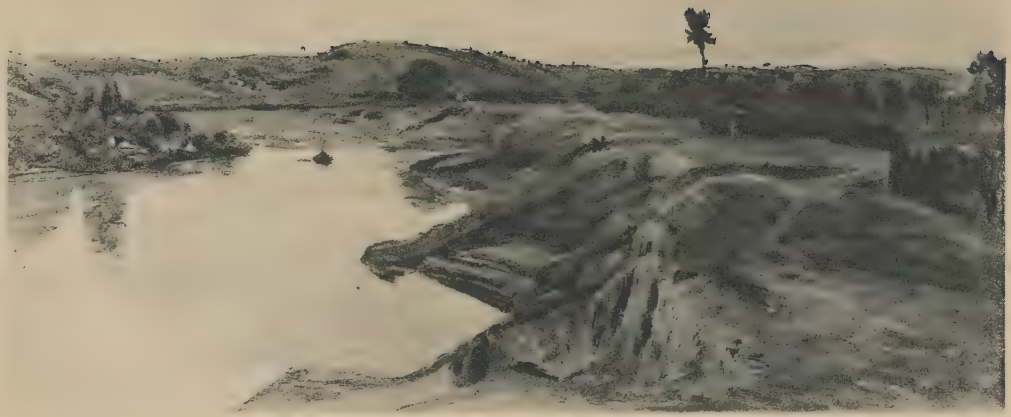
ILE ET PONT SAN BARTOLOMEO

San Bartolomeo Bridge and Island.
Insel und Brücke von San Bartolomeo.
Isola e ponte di San Bartolomeo.
Isla y puente de San Bartolome.



VUE DU CHATEAU SAINT-ANGE

View of Castel Sant'Angelo.
Ansicht des Schlosses Saint-Ange.
Veduta del Castello Sant'Angelo.
Vista del Castillo de Saint-Ange.



PROMENADE DU POUSSIN

Poussin Walk.
Poussin Promenade.

Passeggiata del Poussin.
Pasco del Poussin.

MON AGAR

My Agar.
Mein Agar.

Il mio Agar.
Mia Agar.

ALEXINA LEGOUX

Alexina Legoux.
Alexina Legoux.

Alexina Legoux.
Alexina Legoux.

PIAZZETTA

Piazzetta.
Piazzetta.

Piazzetta.
Plazoleta.

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GÊNES

Genoa.
Genua.

Genova.
Génova.

COROT A LA PALETTE

Corot with a palette.
Corot mit dem Farbenbrett.
Corot colla tavolozza.
Corot a la paleta.

LE JARDIN DE LA CHARTREUSE

La Chartreuse grounds. *Il giardino della Certosa.*
Der Garten von Chartreuse. *El jardin de "La Chartreuse".*

VILLENEUVE-LÈS-AVIGNON

Villeneuve-lès-Avignon.
Villeneuve-lès-Avignon.

Villeneuve-lès-Avignon.
Villeneuve-lès-Avignon.

MOISSONNEUSE

Harvest woman. *Mietitrice.*
Heusammlerin. *Segadora.*

MADAME DESBROCHERS

Madame Desbrochers.
Madame Desbrochers.

La Signora Desbrochers.
Madame Desbrochers.

DEMOCRITE ET LES ABDERITAINS

Democritus and the Abderites.
Democrite und die Abderitaner.
Il Democrito e i Abderitani.
Demócrites y los Abderitanos.

SITE D'ITALIE

Italian scene.
Landschaft aus Italien.

Luogo d'Italia.
Sitio en Italia.

LA VILLA D'ESTE

Villa d'Este.
Villa d'Este.

Villa d'Este.
Villa d'Este.

LA DANSE DES NYMPHES

Dancing Nymphes.
Tanz der Nymphen.
Il ballo delle ninfe.
La danza de las ninfas.

PAYSANNES DE MUR

Peasant women at Mur. *Contadine di Mur.*
Bäuerinnen aus Mur. *Campesinas de Mur.*

PORT DE LA ROCHELLE

Rochelle Harbour.
Hafen von La Rochelle.
Porto della Rochelle.
Puerto de La Rochelle.

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LE VALLON

The Dale.
Das kleine Tal.

La Valletta.
El vallecito.

ROUTE DE SÈVRES

The Sèvres Road.
Landstrasse nach Sèvres.
Strada di Sèvres.
Carretera de Sèvres.

LE CONCERT

Concert.
Das Konzert.

Il Concerto.
El Concierto.

EFFET DU MATIN

Morning effect.
Morgenstimmung.

Effetto del mattino.
Efecto de madrugada.

FILLETTE A SA TOILETTE.

Girl at her dressing-table. *Ragazzina alla toeletta.*
Junges Mädchen bei der Toilette. *Muchachita à la toilette.*

CASTEL GANDOLFO

Castel Gandolfo.
Schloss Gandolfo.

Castel Gandolfo.
Castillo Gandolfo.

JEUNE FEMME A LA ROBE ROSE

Young woman in a pink dress. *Donnina colla veste rosea.*
Junge Frau mit dem Rosakleid. *Joven de traje rosado.*

LE BATELIER ET LA PAYSANNE

The boatman and the peasant woman. *Il barcamlo e la contadina.*
Schiffer und Bäuerin. *El barquero y la campesina.*

VILLE-D'AVRAY

Ville-d'Avray.
Ville-d'Avray.

Ville-d'Avray.
Ville-d'Avray.

LA FEMME A LA PERLE

The Woman with a pearl.
Junge Frau mit der Perle.
La donna colla perla.
La mujer de la perla.

L'ATELIER

The Studio.
Das Atelier.

Il Studio.
El Estudio.

LE PONT DE MANTES

The Bridge of Mantes.
Die Brücke von Mantes.

Il ponte di Mantes.
El puente de Mantes.

TÊTE DE JEUNE ITALIENNE

Head of an Italian Girl. *Capo di una giovine Italiana.*
Kopf einer jungen Italienerin. *Cabeza de joven Italiana.*

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BEFFROI DE DOUAI

Douai Belfry.
Der Wachturm von Douai.
Campanile di Douai.
Torre de Douai.

LA DAME EN BLEU

The blue Lady. *La donna in turchino.*
Die Dame in Blau. *La señora de traje azul.*

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